Open Window

By Saki

"Out through that window, three years ago, they went off for a day's shooting... They never came back."

"My aunt will be down presently, Mr. Nuttel," said a very self-possessed young lady of fifteen; "in the meantime, you must try and put up with me."

Framton Nuttel endeavored to say the correct something which should duly flatter the niece of the moment without unduly discounting the aunt that was to come. Privately he doubted more than ever whether these formal visits on a succession of total strangers would do much to help the nerve cure he was supposed to be undergoing.

"I know how it will be," his sister had said when he was preparing to migrate to this rural retreat; "you will bury yourself down there and not speak to a living soul, and your nerves will be worse than ever from moping. I shall just give you letters of introduction to all the people I know there. Some of them, as far as I can remember, were quite nice."

Framton wondered whether Mrs. Sappleton, the lady to whom he was presenting one of the letters of introduction, came into the nice division.

"Do you know many of the people round here?" asked the niece, when she judged that they had had sufficient silent communion.

"Hardly a soul," said Framton. "My sister was staying here, at the rectory, you know, some four years ago, and she gave me letters of introduction to some of the people here."

He made the last statement in a tone of distinct regret.

"Then you know practically nothing about my aunt?" pursued the self-possessed young lady.

"Only her name and address," admitted the caller. He was wondering whether Mrs. Sappleton was in the married or widowed state. An indefinable something about the room seemed to suggest masculine habitations.

"Her great tragedy happened just three years ago," said the child; "that would be since your sister's time."

"Her tragedy?" asked Framton; somehow in this restful country spot tragedies seemed out of place.

"You may wonder why we keep that window wide open on an October afternoon," said the niece; indicating a large French window that opened on to a lawn.

"It is quite warm for the time of year,' said Framton; "but has that window got anything to do with the tragedy?"

"Out through that window, three years ago to a day, her husband and her two young brothers went off for their day's shooting. They never came back. In crossing the moor to their favorite snipe-shooting ground, they were all three engulfed in a treacherous piece of bog. It had been that dreadful wet summer, you know, and places that were safe in other years gave way suddenly without warning. Their bodies were never recovered. That was the dreadful part of it."

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Here the child's voice lost its self-possessed note and became falteringly human.

"Poor aunt always thinks that they will come back some day, they and the little brown spaniel that was lost with them, and walk in at that window just as they used to do. That is why the window is kept open every evening until it is quite dusk.

"Poor dear aunt, she has often told me how they went out, her husband with his white waterproof coat over his arm, and Ronnie, her youngest brother, singing 'Bertie, why do you bound?' as he always did to tease her, because she said it got on her nerves. Do you know, sometimes on stiff, quiet evenings like this, I almost get a creepy feeling that they will all walk in through that window——"

* * *

She broke off with a little shudder. It was a relief to Framton when the aunt bustled into the room with a whirl of apologies for being late in making her appearance.

"I hope Vera has been amusing you?" she said.

"She has been very interesting," said Framton.

"I hope you don't mind the open window,' said Mrs. Sappleton briskly; "my husband and brothers will be home directly from shooting, and they always come in that way. They've been out for snipe in the marshes today, so they'll make a fine mess over my poor carpets. So like you menfolk, isn't it?"

She rattled on cheerfully about the shooting and the scarcity of birds, and the prospects for duck in the winter. He made a desperate but only partially successful effort to turn the talk on to a less ghastly topic; he was conscious that his hostess was giving him only a fragment of her attention, and her eyes were constantly straying past him to the open window and the lawn beyond. It was certainly an unfortunate coincidence that he should have paid his visit on that tragic anniversary.

"The doctors agree in ordering me complete rest, an absence of mental excitement, and avoidance of anything in the nature of violent physical exercise," announced Framton, who labored under the tolerably widespread delusion that total strangers and chance acquaintances are hungry for the least detail of one's ailments and infirmities, their cause and cure. "On the matter of diet they are not so much in agreement," he continued.

"No?" said Mrs. Sappleton, in a voice which only replaced a yawn at the last moment. Then she suddenly brightened into alert attention—but not to what Framton was saying.

"Here they are at last!" she cried. "Just in time for tea, and don't they look as if they were muddy up to their eyes!"

* * *

Framton shivered slightly and turned towards the niece with a look intended to convey sympathetic comprehension. The child was staring out through the open window with dazed horror in her eyes. In a chill of nameless fear Framton swung round in his seat and looked in the same direction.

In the deepening twilight three figures were walking across the lawn towards the window; they all carried guns under their arms, and one of them was additionally burdened with a white coat hung over his shoulders. A tired, brown spaniel kept close at their heels. Noiselessly they neared the house, and then a hoarse young voice chanted out of the dusk: "I said, 'Bertie, why do you bound'?"

Framton grabbed wildly at his stick and hat; the hall door, the gravel drive, and the front gate were dimly-noted stages in his headlong retreat. A cyclist coming along the road had to run into the hedge to avoid imminent collision.

"Here we are, my dear," said the bearer of the white mackintosh, coming in through the window; fairly muddy, but most of it's dry. Who was that who bolted out as we came up?"

"A most extraordinary man, a Mr. Nuttel," said Mrs. Sappleton; "could only talk about his illness, and dashed off without a word of good-bye or apology when you arrived. One would think he had seen a ghost."

"I expect it was the spaniel," said the niece calmly; 'he told me he had a horror of dogs. He was once hunted into a cemetery somewhere on the banks of the Ganges by a pack of pariah dogs, and had to spend the night in a newly-dug grave with the creatures snarling and grinning and foaming just above him. Enough to make anyone lose their nerve."

Romance at short notice was her specialty.—Pearson's Weekly.

Rabbit—"I understand Mr. Possum has a case on you."

Miss Porcupine—"Yes, he's badly stuck on me."

"Phyllis has brains enough for two."

"Then why don't you marry her?"

Fresh Air School

Dressed warmly in Cowl-like robes these N.Y. school children work out-of-doors. The above picture shows some of the pupils busily attacking their crackers and milk.

Sunday School Lesson

November 8. Lesson VI—Paul in Ephesus—Acts 19: 8-20. Golden Text—Have no fellowship with the unfruithful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.—Ephesians 5: 11.

I. THE FULL GOSPEL, Acts 19: 1-7.

II. SUPERSTITION IN RELIGION, Acts 19: 8-20.

III. THE BEGINNING OF THE END, Acts 19: 21-41.

IV. PAGAN VICES AND CHRISTIANITY, Eph. 5: 5-11.

INTRODUCTION—Paul was permitted to leave Corinth in peace and quiet. After a visit to Jerusalem, Anitoch and the Galatian churches, he came to Ephesus, Acts 18: 18-23.

Ephesus, a more populous, wealthy and important city than Corinth, was capital of the province of "Asia." "Asia" means not the modern continent of Asia, but that western part of it with which the Romans first came into contact. Ephesus also had a great religious attraction in its famous Temple of Diana. Paul, according to his custom, settled in this strategic situation and began to teach the new religion.

I. THE FULL GOSPEL, Acts 19: 1-7.

Among the believers whom Paul found in Ephesus, one group was specially interesting, v. 1. Finding these men in that fringe of partial converts which surrounded every synagogue, and knowing nothing about them except their evident sincerity, Paul accepted them as disciples. Soon, however, he discovered that they lacked that peculiar enthusiasm which marked the "Spirit filled" believers. "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" he asked.

Coming into a modern church, would he see a similar dullness and absence of Christian joy? The "joy" in believing is too often absent. Such joy as the average Christian possesses is frequently attributed to a dutiful family, good health, or a satisfactory income.

II. SUPERSTITION IN RELIGION, Acts 19: 8-20.

After three months' preaching in the synagogue, Paul found it necessary, as in other places, to withdraw. He secured the lecture room of Tyrannus—vacant daily from 11 to 4 and there preached for two years. So deep was the impression which Paul made that his superstitious converts believed that even an article of clothing which touched him had healing power. Unknown to Paul, who certainly would have discouraged such magical practices, zealous admirers would bring to the sick various articles which had been in contact with his person. Certain physical and mental conditions were cured. It was "faith healing." Not the articles of course, no more than the relics of St. Anne de Beaupre, wrought the cures—but the faith in them.

The sons of Sceva, pagan magicians, saw in these cures possibilities for themselves. They would use this name "Jesus" which they thought Paul used as a sort of charm. The demented fellow on whom they tried it saw the deception and assaulted them with such fury that they barely escaped with their lives, v. 16. The incident resulted in many converts. Christians who had been practising the magic arts in secret, confessed and brought their books—very valuable—and burned them publicly, vs. 17-19. They not only removed temptation from their own way; they removed it from others also. When the church members purified their own lives "that word of God grew mightily, and prevailed, v. 20.

III. THE BEGINNING OF THE END, Acts 19: 21-41.

Verse 21 marks the beginning of the end of Acts. The keynote is struck in "I must also see Rome." Rome had long been Paul's goal. Now we are to read how he attained it. His desire for Rome was God's 'will, but he learned like others that:

'Twas he who taught me thus to pray,
And he I know has answered prayer,
But it has been in such a way
As almost drove me to despair.

He was not to have a quiet exit, as from Corinth. One of "the many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16: 9) suddenly emerged in the person of Demetrius, v. 24. Christianity was ruining his business. The turning from idolatry and magic in v. 18 was evidently real. He saw a serious falling-off in trade. The preaching that interfered with profits had to be stopped.

IV. PAGAN VICES AND CHRISTIANITY, Eph. 5: 5-11.

Not only against superstition had Paul to wage war, but against sin, personal and social. The letter "to the Ephesians," which was probably meant for more than one church, deals among other matters, with the temptations which surround Christians in a pagan society. In the "kingdom of God and of Christ," v. 15, that is, the Christian Brotherhood, there is no room for the "covetous" man. "Covetousness," as used here, means more than mere avarice. It stands for that attitude of life which makes one's own advantage and pleasure the sole object. The impulse which leads one man to covet another's share of this world's goods drives another man into impurity. This motive of self-gratification, wherever it may lead one, is so alien to the Christian spirit that it is not even to be mentioned, v. 3.

The way to "reprove" these "works of darkness" is to live a life so unquestionably pure and right that it will reveal the heathen vices as they are. It is still the "Royal Way."

A Rising Scale

The deaf man stepped down from the dentist's chair after the operation.

"How much do I owe you for that?" he asked.

The dentist looked thoughtful.

"Three guineas," he replied.

"Five guineas?" asked the deaf man uncertainly.

"No," put in the dentist quickly; "nine guineas."

"My poor man, all the way from Chicago! Didn't you find it very hot traveling?"

"Not at all, madam. I always take a refrigerator car in the summer."

Hope for the best, prepare for the worst, and take what comes.

At the Top of Mount Fuji

Who has not heard of Mount Fuji and longed for a glimpse of its snowcrowned summit? This majestic heaven-kissing peak is everything a mountain should be. It is shaped even as little children expect a mountain to be shaped, it is beautiful to look upon from near and far, it is surrounded by the halo of legend and tradition as Japan's highest and most sacred mountain. Best of all, it is accessible.

So when I learned that the climb could be made between the time the Siberia Maru arrived at Yokohama and sailed from Kobe I resolved that Fuji's summit would be my first destination after presenting some letters of introduction at Tokyo. Within twenty-four hours of landing I would be on my way to get a bird's-eye view of Japan from its very top.

"Americans are certainly energetic," remarked the Foreign Office official in Tokyo upon whom I called that afternoon. "I have been planning to climb Fjui myself for the past twenty years. Somehow I have never got around to doing it. Yet here you come along from America and within a few hours are on your way. Well, I hope you enjoy the climb and get a clear view. Our rainy season has been lasting a little longer than usual. . . ."

A youthful member of a Tokyo hiking club who spoke some English and better German was soon on his way with the American editor to Gotemba, the little town lying at the foot of Fuji. As the train wound its way through the foothills, sheets of rain dashed against the windows while clouds and mist obscured all view of the snow-clad peak towering twelve thousand three hundred and eighty-seven feet above the plain.

The ascent began. It was very gradual, recalling in its early stages the journey up Mount Rainier in the State of Washington, or the slowly mounting slope of Mauna Loa on the Island of Hawaii. As in the Hawaiian Island, there was semitropical vegetation and red volcanic soil. After a little distance had been traversed wild flowers and anemones abounded on the mosses under the fragrant fir trees. In the open spaces we heard the distant song of larks and in the wood nightingales chanted melodiously and even responded when my young companion whistled the notes of their song. . .

When our eyes turned in the direction from which we had come they beheld one of the world's loveliest mountain views. Fog and mists were fleeing in every direction before the piercing rays of the late afternoon sun. As their gray curtains swept away, one low mountain range after another came into the line of vision. Between the slopes were beautiful lakes surrounded by sloping green fields.—From "We Look at the Wold," by H. V. Kaltenborn.

Amusing Anecdotes

Some racy anecdotes of John W. ("Betcha-a-Million") Gates, capitalist and gambler, are told by Albert Stevens Crockett (in "Peacocks on Parade," a chronicle of New York in the "Naughty Nineties.") Gates acquired his nickname, "Betcha-a-Million," from his habit of using that form of wager upon the slightest provocation. He would bet on anything. One afternoon a heavy rainstorm came up. The pelting of raindrops on the window-panes made Gates's eyes brighten.

"Say, John," he suddenly remarked to John Drake, "see them two raindrops? I'll bet that fellow on this side reaches the bottom before that one over there."

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Ten dollars was the first stake, and then this jumped to one hundred. It was a new sport and it became lively. For some minutes, at least, they staked hundred-dollar bills on the course and speed of raindrops chasing down a window-pane, just as if they were at some race track, playing the ponies, says Crockett.

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Often what to an ordinary man would represent a huge fortune would change hands among Gates's "crowd" during a few hours' play at poker or bridge. At one of these games a prominent New York politician was invited to "make a fourth" at bridge. By no means wealthy, caution made him inquire as he sat down: "By the way, what are we playing for?"

"One a point,' Gates answered tersely.

The game began and ended. The New Yorker finished 330 points ahead.

"You'll get your cheque tomorrow," Gates's secretary—who attended to such matters—told the winner.

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When it arrived, the New Yorker fell back in astonishment. It was for $33,000! From Gates's secretary he learned that the game was for $100 a point, not $1, as he had imagined. So he sought out Gates.

"Mr. Gates," he protested, "I don't feel right in taking this money because, in a sense, I got it under false pretences." He went on to explain the situation, when Gates broke in with:

'Cut it out. We had the game, didn't we? You won didn't you? You got the cheque, didn't you? Well, let's forget about it.

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Writing to Austin Dobson just after he had finished his Life of the poet Gray (of Elegy fame), Sir Edmund Gosse said—the letter is quoted in Evan Charteris' Life of Gosse:

"I am in a state of agitation; I have just written the death of Gray, with inexpressible excitement: I have been crying so that my tears blinded the page—how ridiculous—tears for a little man who died more than a hundred years ago—how ridiculous!"

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Which reminds me that some authors do suffer horribly when a work on a story with tragedy stalking through it. I recall, for instance, that when A. S. M. Hutchinson was writing "This Freedom"—which followed "If Winter Comes" he became a wreck while working on the chapter dealing with the suicide of a young girl. He was haggard and "all in" and you could see in his face that it was taking hold of him terribly. He would stay up all night with his characters and suffer excruciating agony in their company.

Curious, isn't it?

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Hamlin Garland—in his new book, "Companions on the Trail"—quotes Edward W. Bok as telling him this story about Rudyard Kipling with whom Bok once crossed the ocean. Said Bok:

"One day as I was lying in my steamer chair reading "The Brushwood Boy,' Rudyard came up behind me with a roll of wet newspaper and gave me a fearful swat. 'Put that book down,' he said. I was hurt and disgusted. 'That was a bad boy's trick,' I remarked.

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"I was hot, and when he saw that I meant it he sat down beside me and tried to make me forget it. He apologized and then explained the genesis of the book. 'I was seen years writing that story,' he said, 'and it represents my own life—in a way.' He offered to read it aloud to me as compensation for his cruel swat, and in the end I forgave him. I loved him."

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Another of Mr. Garland's stories is about Bret Harte. Garland heard it from the lips of William Dean Howells.

"Bret was a careless vagabond," said Howells "improvident but highly amusing, and we all liked him. He was always in debt. It fell to me on one occasion to present him as a lecturer to an audience in Tremont Temple (Boston), and when I called at his house to escort him to the hall, I found him in the custody of a constable.

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"Harte explained, without apparent concern, that his tailor had sent the officer to collect payment for a suit of clothes and the constable, said to me: 'This man shall not give his lecture without handing over his fee.' Thereupon Harte invited him to ride with us to the hall and sit on the platform.

"This he did," continued Howells, "and so, as I rose to present the speaker, I had on my right hand a distinguished novelist, and on my left the constable—Harte being the least perturbed of the trio."

MUTT AND JEFF— By BUD FISHER

The Perfect Lover Should Have Everything.